

March 18, 2016

Besides being Holy Week, this week Fr. Tom, the interview committee, and I will be starting the process of meeting the candidates for the SJS principal job. In the past two letters I have tried to outline the basics of the hiring process, but there is still a big question that needs to be answered. Since the pastors are the ones that make the final decision, what expertise do they have and what is the basis for their decision. The point to make is that decisions in a parish are made by the pastor because that is according to Canon Law (Church Law). As I mentioned the Church is not a democracy. The governance comes from the top down. This is to assure that the People of God do not start voting on how God will operate. That is the simple answer but it doesn't resolve a natural concern that people would have in wondering about expertise a pastor might have in making a decision like this.

I do not know all of Fr. Tom's background but I do know that he had to work with St. Bonaventure Elementary School in Columbus and also was part of the board for Scotus Catholic H.S. My 37 years as a priest has provided many opportunities to work with schools. As an associate pastor I worked with five elementary schools. Those were taste tests to watch pastors deal with the responsibility. As a pastor I have now worked with five elementary schools and two high schools. I have had to hire and fire principals, help schools grow and have even had to close a school. With this background I have learned to pay close attention to what is going on in a school on a formal and informal level. I listen to school boards, parish councils, finance committees, parents, teachers, administrators, staff, and students. It is a matter of keeping an ear to the ground and my eyes open. I get to hear more praises and complaints than most people would even dream of.

One of the biggest things that I have learned is that there are a lot of people with ideas and it is not always the loudest person who has the best ideas. I also know that it can be heartbreaking when some of the best ideas simply can't be done because of lack of funds. I also know that contrary to some "education experts" throwing money at a problem is usually not the answer. The understanding of this balance is one of the things that I look for in a candidate to run a Catholic School. I am well aware that a school is one part of a parish budget and so it can't be taken for granted. I also know how hard teachers work in our schools and that they don't have the same salaries, benefits or pensions of their public school counterparts. And yet they do a great job. One of the biggest things that anyone who works in a Catholic School must know is that we are not just about getting the best academic or athletic performance from each student. We are helping them understand how each part of their life fits into their journey through this world into the next.

That is why the principal and the pastor(s) must work together to create an environment to help each person involved in the school to know how to live with Christ. Personally I think of this with every change that happens in a school. For each action must be seen as working with Jesus. In that way a student with struggles can go from being a disruption in a classroom to being a new opportunity for the whole class to learn how to get along. A teacher who is struggling with a particular class knows that they will be understood, and that they have support and not just a summary firing squad. A parent whose life is full of struggles will know that whether the problem they are bringing up can be solved or not, that they are working with people who care about their child and them. For it is in these different struggles that we are all tested by God to see if we are understanding His Word. With these lessons in mind Fr. Tom and I will be looking for a good person to work with the pastors, teachers, staff, parents, students, and parishes. So I thank you for the information you are giving us through the survey. We will pass it on to the new principal after using it in the hiring process. I also ask that you pray for us throughout this process.

Fr. Frank Baumert
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